

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 HA-05 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

/084 W

-----012177 260901Z /13-11

R 252045Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9125

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

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FOR: DEPT OF LABOR - ILAB DAN LAZORCHECK

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: ELAB, SHUM, PINT, BL

SUBJ: BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT RESTORES TRADE UNION FREEDOMS

1. IN SPECIAL CABINET SESSION JANUARY 24 GOB APPROVED DECREE RESTORING FULL TRADE UNION LIBERTIES. RIGHTS OF WORKERS TO STRIKE, TO CONTROL UNION DUES AND TO ELECT THEIR OWN LEADERS, ALL SUSPENDED IN NOVEMBER 1974, WERE RESTORED. DECREE ALSO PROVIDES THAT LOCAL UNIONS, FEDERATIONS AND CONFEDERATIONS WILL HOLD THEIR ELECTIONS WITHIN 30, 60, AND 90 DAYS RESPECTIVELY, AT WHICH TIME LABOR COORDINATORS, APPOINTED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, WILL BE REPLACED BY THE NEWLY-ELECTED OFFICIALS.

2. MINISTER OF LABOR MARIO VARGAS ISSUED STATEMENT THAT BOTH THE FEDERACION SINDICAL DE TRABAJADORES MINEROS DE BOLIVIA (FSTMB) AND THE CENTRAL OBRERO BOLIVIANO (COB) TWO POWERFUL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE CONTINUED TO OPERATE CLANDESTINELY SINCE BEING DECLARED ILLEGAL IN 1976 AND 1971

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RESPECTIVELY, WILL BE ALLOWED TO REORGANIZE IF DESIRED BY THEIR CONSTITUTENT ORGANIZATIONS. THE FSTMB AND THE COB ARE HEADED BY VICTOR LOPEZ AND FORMER BOLIVIAN VICE PRESIDENT JUAN LECHIN OQUENDO RESPECTIVELY, BOTH OF WHOM HAVE BEEN LIVING IN EXILE IN CARACAS. UNDER THE RECENTLY ISSUED GENERAL AMNESTY, BOTH CAN NOW RETURN TO BOLIVIA.

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH GOB DECREE STATES THAT DECISION TO RESTORE LABOR FREEDOMS WAS TAKEN "IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONALIZATION" OF THE COUNTRY BEGUN NOVEMBER 9, 1977. IN FACT, HOWEVER, THE GOB TOOK THIS DECISION BECAUSE IT FEARED AN OPPOSITION ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT THE ISSUE DURING THE CAMPAIGN, POSSIBLY WITH SOME TACTIC SIMILAR TO THE RECENT HUNGER STRIKE AND BECAUSE THE WHOLE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER UNIONS WAS COLLAPSING. MINISTER OF LABOR VARGAS IS DEFINITELY NOT HAPPY WITH THE DECISION. HE TOLD AN EMBAOFF JANUARY 24 THAT NOW THE WAY IS OPEN TO "ANARCHY AND CHAOS" AND PLACED THE BLAME ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT. OTHER GOB OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN TO EMBOFFS THAT THE COB, FSTMB AND OTHER "OPPOSITION" ELEMENTS WILL TRY TO PRESS UNREALISTIC WAGE INCREASE DEMANDS ON THE GOVERNMENT IN THE HOPE OF STIMULATING A SERIES OF STRIKES OR EVEN A GENERAL STRIKE WHICH WILL DISRUPT THE ELECTION PROCESS AND WEAKEN THE GOB.
BOEKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, POLITICAL FREEDOM, PACIFICATION, LABOR UNIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LAPAZ00733
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780038-1115
Format: TEL
From: LA PAZ
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780125/aaaaaury.tel
Line Count: 81
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f6cea1e0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3717882
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT RESTORES TRADE UNION FREEDOMS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, BL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f6cea1e0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014